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## JESUS AN EXAMPLE OF FAITH

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“The author and finisher of our faith.”—Heb. 12:1.

The word “our” is an interpolation. Its presence alters entirely the thought of the writer, who is not thinking of faith as something developed in us, but as something exemplified in Jesus. “Author” is a very infelicitous rendering of *ἀρχηγός*, which properly means “leader.” Jesus is not here represented as the author of faith, in the sense that he is the originator of it; he is rather the leader of faith; going before us in the way of faith; teaching us and showing us how to live the life of faith. In the other instances, three in number, in which the word occurs in the New Testament, it is twice translated “prince,” and once “captain.” In Acts 3:15, Jesus is called “the *prince* of life;” in Acts 5:31, “a *prince* and a Savior,” and in Heb. 2:10, “the *captain* of our salvation.” In the text we are considering the word is also rendered “captain” in the Revised Version. Jesus may thus be said to be the prince or captain of faith. But “leader” is the more exact meaning of the word. He is also the “finisher” or “perfector” of faith; carrying it to perfection in his life; thus furnishing, as the rendering of the Twentieth Century New Testament has it, a “perfect example of faith.”

The thought is unusual, Jesus being generally set before us as the object of faith rather than as an example of faith. Yet this thought must necessarily be implied in many of the lessons of his life; and how could he be a perfect example to us if he had not lived a life of perfect faith?

When the example of Jesus is spoken of, his faith is generally the one thing that is omitted. We speak of him as an example of love, of meekness, of patience, of hope, of courage, of sacrifice, but we have no word for him as an example of faith. And yet here if anywhere we need the inspiring influence of his example.

If we turn to the hymnology of the church, there we find direction

regarding how to copy him we love in everything but in his faith. How familiar is the sentiment expressed in the lines—

Such was thy truth, and such thy zeal,  
Such deference to thy Father's will,  
Such love, and meekness so divine,  
I would transcribe and make them mine.

To this also ought to be added, "Such was thy faith, O Son of man, I would transcribe and make it mine." By living the life of faith; by walking the way of faith before us, he has "left us an example that we should follow his steps."

The whole life of Jesus showed that he lived in the exercise of faith; and that faith was the foundation principle of his life. In the silent years of waiting in Nazareth his spiritual life was nourished by faith. He was conscious of personal relations with the Father, and impatient to be about the things of his house. In his baptism his faith was declared; in the temptation in the wilderness which followed, it was tested. His temptation was not theatrical display, but was a real conflict of soul, in which the tempter tried to break down his confidence in God. When he was hungry after the forty days' fast, the tempter came to him and said, "If thou be the Son of God command that these stones be made bread." The object of his first attack was to have him renounce his dependence upon God, and take things into his own hand. So in the other temptations he sought to destroy his perfect confidence in the Father. But he signally failed, and at the very beginning of his public career the faith of Jesus achieved a perfect victory. Through all his public ministry which followed, in times of obscurity and popularity alike, Jesus went on his course in faith. He walked by faith not by sight. He never doubted, never wavered. His feeling fluctuated, but not his faith. His faith was steadfast and abiding. He believed in the rational order of the universe, in the final outworking of the purpose of eternal love. Living a life of faith, he lived a life of prayer. Because he believed without ceasing, he prayed without ceasing. Like the Servant of Jehovah he did not fail, nor was he discouraged by the difficulties before him, but trusting in the God to whom he prayed he held on and held out to the end, in spite of opposition. When he saw the dark clouds gathering

and heard the muttering of the storm, he never faltered. "Now is my soul troubled," he exclaimed, "and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour. But for this cause came I unto this hour" (John 12:27). In the hour of agony he discerned the divine purpose in his life and never doubted that it would be accomplished; and when he saw the shadow of the cross creeping near, he exclaimed, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto myself" (John 12:32). Instead of looking upon death as defeat, he looked upon it as the means by which his influence was to be propagated. "Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth by itself alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit" (John 12:24). And when the hour of final conflict came, in the midst of its awful darkness he clung to the divine hand saying "*My God, My God.*" Even in that hour of desolation, when he felt as if he had been forsaken, the anchor chain of faith did not snap. That he was also sustained as death drew near by faith in his resurrection, is clearly brought out in Mark 8:31; 9:9, 31; 10:33, 34. That he was sustained by faith in the success of his mission, and in the ultimate triumph of his kingdom is equally evident from the words which follow our text, "he for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising shame." The joy that was set before him was the joy of seeing sin destroyed, righteousness made triumphant, and the kingdom of God established among men. Through the power of that faith-born joy he put shame and suffering under his feet. With faith's farseeing eye he saw of the travail of his soul and was satisfied.

This view of Jesus, as one who in the matter of faith leads the way and brings faith to perfection, restores to us the human Jesus, of whom scholastic theology has too often robbed us. Instead of being removed from our common human experience, he is brought into the very heart of it. As human he is imitable; and he is imitable in his faith as in everything else. More specifically—

1. *Our faith is to be the same as his.*—It is to be a reflection of it, a copy of it. Just as those who follow in the steps of Abraham are said to be "of the faith of Abraham," those who tread in the footsteps of Jesus are "of the faith of Jesus." The faith which he possessed they possess. Their faith differs from his, not in kind, but

only in degree. The one is a twinkling lamp, the other is the sun shining in its strength; and as the light of a lamp and the light of the sun is the same in its constituent elements, so the faith of the feeblest saint is essentially the same as the faith of Jesus. One with Jesus in his faith, we are one with him in the deepest thing in his life.

2. *Faith is to be the foundation principle of our life as it was of his.*—The reason doubtless why his faith is here singled out for our imitation is because all that he did sprang from it. And if we live by faith as he did, faith will bear the same fruit in our lives that it bore in his. It will make us faithful, it will make us holy, it will make us altruistic. With faith running through the entire web of life like a thread of gold, character will be beautified; with faith as the backbone of the ethical life character will be strengthened. From filial confidence will spring filial obedience. And where faith endures unto death there will be faithfulness unto death. Moreover, nothing short of inward imitation of Jesus in his faith, nothing short of copying him in the inward controlling principle of his life, will keep our religion from becoming formal and mechanical, and make us truly like him.

3. *Our faith is to be held in the face of difficulties as his was.*—Like him we are to fight for faith; like him when we walk in the dark we are to believe that clouds will break. With quiet and perfect trust we are to await the issue of each new event in our lives. We are to go on without flinching even if our path leads up to a cross. Catching something of his sublime faith in the future, seeing the harvest in the seed, the oak in the acorn, the achievement in the promise, we enter into the rest of faith, running with patience the race set before us. Partaking of his calm unwavering faith in the God who is, and in the glory that is to come, we triumph over every difficulty and finish our course with joy.

4. *As the most illustrious example of faith he is to be the inspirer and strengthener of our faith.*—"His going before us in faith" says Alford, "has made faith possible for us; his perfecting faith in his own person and example has made faith effectual for us." Through the power of his quickening influence his faith is transmitted to us as the faith of a parent is transmitted to a child.

In the previous chapter the writer of this epistle gives a list of the Old Testament saints who lived by faith, and died by faith. Their faith, which rested upon the promises of God, took hold of things not seen. With their eye fixed upon the goal they homeward pressed their way through calm and storm. Yet though they had "witness borne to them through their faith, they received not the promises, God having provided some better thing concerning us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect." From these examples of strong but imperfect faith, he passes on to the one perfect example of faith, the one in whose life faith was full-rounded and complete; and he says, "When weary and faint in your minds consider him; consider him as the prince of believers; the captain of believers; the leader of believers; consider him as the one perfect believer, the life-blood of whose faith is to enter into you, making you in all your upward strugglings gloriously triumphant."

O Master mine, teach me thy faith; help me to follow thee as my leader in the way of faith. Help me to see in thy faith made perfect what my faith ought to be. Help me to make thy matchless faith my pattern; and help me under its inspiring influence to walk in the path of righteousness, until my journey is done, and I enter that blessed state where faith is lost in sight.